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### The Hidden Debate: The Formation of Nuclear Doctrines in the Middle East

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#### Introduction

In August 1980, a panel of 32 experts in such areas as nuclear weapons, military science, and international relations concluded that the likelihood of a nuclear war occurring anywhere in the world would increase from about 1 per cent to 5 per cent between 1980 and 1984. They further predicted that the risk would continue to grow until it reached 10 per cent in 1990.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, however, the panel's most significant conclusion was that the first nuclear war is most likely to be fought between Israel and the Arab nations, with Israel winning but losing most of its population.<sup>2</sup> If the conclusions of the panel were correct — and there is still no evidence to prove that they were wrong — then the Middle East should be observed very carefully from this point of view.

The most widely held conception of the Israeli-Arab conflict, as far as nuclear strategy is concerned, considers the Arab countries and Israel to be unitary actors. This is not only fallacious — it is dangerous; many contradictions exist among the nuclear policies of Arab states as well as between Israeli policy makers. On both sides of the conflict, there are disagreements concerning the outcome of a nuclear arms race: Will it lead to a 'balance of terror', or to a regional catastrophe?

Although concealed behind public statements and declarations, this debate and its details become evident to the careful student of the policies of Israeli and Arab leaders. Thus far, most of the scholarly work on nuclear strategy and proliferation in the Middle East has suffered from two major drawbacks: the first is that the authors have approached these issues from a Western type of rationality and perception which differs considerably from that of the Middle East; second, they do not speak the languages of the countries they study and hence have had limited access to relevant material.

The objective of this article is to describe most of the views of those Middle Eastern leaders who have influenced, or will influence, the nuclear future of their region. Israeli policy, however, will be treated most extensively for several reasons: Israel, of all Middle Eastern States, is considered to be the most advanced in the nuclear field; furthermore, during the last 20 years, Israeli political and military leaders have quite frankly expressed their opinions on theories concerning the use of nuclear force and on nuclear technology; and if a nuclear war should ever take place in the Middle East, it would be primarily because of Israel's status as a nuclear state — or at least a state with a 'bomb in the basement' option. Of course, the Arab world cannot be neglected. I will, therefore, try to construct a new typology for the Arab

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states within the context of nuclear policy. Special attention will be devoted to Egypt, as it is still the strongest state in the Arab world, and is perhaps the only one which could independently achieve a nuclear option, if and when desired. Finally, the article will attempt to forecast new developments in Israel affecting the rôle of nuclear weapons in the future of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

### Arab Viewpoints

#### EGYPT

Egypt was considered, at least until Sadat's peace initiative in November 1977, as the leading Arab state in the Israeli-Arab conflict. Since Egypt is also the most advanced state in the technological and military fields, and since it is the only Arab state that took part in all of the Arab-Israeli wars, the Egyptian position on Israeli nuclear efforts is sufficiently critical to be treated separately from the rest of the Arab world.

In the early 1960s, when Israel's secret efforts were first revealed, Nasser estimated that he had enough time to prepare a pre-emptive strike against the nuclear project in Dimona. This was a main cause for the call for Arab solidarity and for the convening of the 'Council of the Arab League' in early 1961. On Nasser's initiative, the Council decided to prepare a war against Israel's water project, which was being constructed to supply the Negev desert with water from the Sea of Galilee. Outwardly, the threat posed by Israel's diversion of the Jordan river was the major topic on the agenda; in reality, these Arab nations were no less concerned about Israel's nascent nuclear option.<sup>3</sup>

This was the principal policy through which Nasser tried to deal with the problem before Israel had the bomb; this was sufficient, of course, as long as it was clear that Israel had not yet achieved a nuclear option. When Nasser discovered in the mid-1960s that he would not be able to launch a pre-emptive war before Israel acquired nuclear weapons, he tried another approach. Believing that having nuclear weapons on Egyptian soil was the answer to Israel's nuclear capability, Nasser tried to achieve this through different sources, one of which was probably the USSR. Although the USSR refused to supply him with such weapons, it did pledge protection if Israel should acquire such arms.<sup>4</sup>

It is unclear whether Nasser's provocative steps leading to the 1967 war were planned as part of a preventive strike against Israel's nuclear facilities. Since the most commonly accepted interpretation is that Nasser did *not* intend to go to war, it may be a fair assumption that in exchange for evacuating the Sinai Peninsula (when and if the question should come to the negotiation table), he would have demanded the halting of the Israeli nuclear plan. The failure of the Egyptian army in the 1967 war as well as in the war of attrition (which lasted until August 1970) diverted Nasser's attention to other, more urgent problems. According to all indications, however, this was the period in which Israel moved to a hidden status with 'a bomb in the basement'.<sup>5</sup>

When he came to power in September 1970, Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, faced a more complicated situation. On the one hand, he presumed that

since Israel already had the bomb, a pre-emptive strike against the Dimona facilities would be fruitless. A full-scale war intended to win back the Sinai and penetrate Israel's pre-1967 borders was considered impossible for two reasons: the inferiority of Egyptian conventional arms, and the veiled Israeli threats to make use of the 'last resort capability' in a desperate situation. This sparked a debate within the Egyptian leadership between the pro-Soviets and Sadat. Pro-Soviets such as Ali Sabri, Muhammad Hassanin Heikal, General Sadek, and Ismail Fahmi demanded either the positioning of Soviet nuclear arms and delivery systems in Egypt, or at least Soviet guarantees against possible future Israel threats. Sadat, on the other hand, was not ready to pay the political price of such a step;<sup>6</sup> and since the Soviet Union rejected the first demand anyhow, Sadat had no difficulty in ignoring the opposition to his policy on the Israeli nuclear threat.

Yet the nuclear debate in Egypt has continued along these two lines until today. Sadat's primary policy in this field was to prevent the development of a scenario in which Israel would feel compelled to reveal its nuclear weapons and strategy. By adhering to such a policy, Egypt would neither be threatened by Israeli nuclear weapons, nor would it have to pay the political and economic cost of acquiring such arms.

In 1973 this policy came into operation when Egypt pursued limited war aims, namely, the occupation of part of the Sinai, without threatening Israel's pre-1967 borders. The main objective of the October war, as far as Sadat was concerned, was to obtain a lever to move to a diplomatic settlement.

The policy of 'partial agreements' between 1973 and 1977 was partly motivated by Sadat's fear of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. There are quite a few reports indicating that his peace initiative in November 1977 was motivated by this fear as well.<sup>7</sup> Flora Lewis of the *New York Times* reported that within the framework of the peace settlement between Egypt and Israel, the Egyptians would demand that Israel accept certain limitations on its nuclear programme. She did not forget to add that Israel would have to reject this demand because of the nuclear efforts of other Middle Eastern nations — especially Iraq.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Sadat's view of future conflict in this region leads us to the conclusion that the Egyptian leaders did not want to take the risk of an Israeli-Arab nuclear arms race, which he believed was a highly probable outcome of the conflict if it remained unresolved. Faced with the choice between an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, which jeopardized (at least for the time being) Egypt's status as the leading Arab state, and a continued conflict with its inherent danger of escalation to nuclear confrontation, Sadat opted for the first alternative. This does not mean, of course, that his policy was determined solely by the nuclear factor — but this was always quite important in his calculations.

Having objected to Sadat's nuclear policy vis-à-vis Israel for over a decade, the opposition has always believed that Egypt should have its own nuclear programme. Ismail Fahmi is probably the best spokesman for the opposition, not only because he resigned his position as minister of foreign affairs in protest at Sadat's peace initiative, but also because he has most clearly

expressed the opposition's arguments. In two articles in the opposition paper *A-Sha'ab*,<sup>9</sup> Fahmi recently set forth the grounds against Sadat's policy, especially his initiative to ratify the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Based on his almost 25-year involvement with the problem, the former minister of foreign affairs claims that if Egypt should ratify the NPT, it would forfeit all prospects of maintaining its rôle as a leading state in the region. Today, Israel is the only nuclear power in the Middle East; in the future, Libya and Iraq might also attain this status. If Egypt does not want to become a second- or third-rate nation, it must have an independent nuclear research programme with the goal of obtaining a nuclear option as quickly as possible. According to Fahmi, nuclear status would provide Egypt with the following advantages: a) it would neutralize the ever-present possibility of Israeli nuclear threats and blackmail; b) it would neutralize the possibility of similar threats from other nuclear states in the region (e.g., Libya or Iraq); c) it would lead to a technological, scientific, and strategic revolution in Egypt, thus making it a leading state in the region.

#### THE REST OF THE ARAB WORLD

The rest of the Arab world is divided into two main camps which correspond to the two principal Egyptian approaches on neutralization of the Israeli nuclear threat. For our purposes, we can distinguish between revolutionary states, whose objectives call for a change in the status quo of the region, and the conservative states, who are worried about drastic changes in the status quo.

Aside from being conservative in a general sense, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Jordan also have conservative nuclear policies. Although the oil-producing countries can certainly afford to invest large sums of money in a nuclear infrastructure, there are no indications that they plan to do so in the near future. It is rumoured that in 1975 Saudi Arabia did sign a secret deal with France to purchase a nuclear reactor,<sup>10</sup> but since then there has been no hint that the Saudis are seriously pursuing a nuclear programme; it is also obvious that once the Saudis should decide to develop nuclear weapons, they would be doing so in response to Iraqi pressures.<sup>11</sup> This Saudi behaviour is, of course, understandable, because conservative leaders see any drastic changes in the region as a source of danger to their own regimes. A nuclear arms race could certainly upset the status quo. Therefore, some public declarations notwithstanding, it is in their own interest to prevent the introduction of nuclear weapons to the Middle East.

On the other hand, the 'revolutionary' group of states seems to view the acquisition of nuclear arms as a necessary step. Each of these states — mainly Iraq, Libya, and Syria — would like to achieve a nuclear option in order either to neutralize the Israeli advantage or to accumulate power in the regional subsystem. It is clear, in the cases of Libya and Iraq, that such nuclear efforts are already under way; yet, because nations generally acquire nuclear status secretly, no state which is trying to obtain the bomb will admit it, especially since some of those making efforts in this direction have already signed the NPT (e.g., Iraq, Libya, Syria). Thus, the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein,

was able to hold a press conference in which he denied that his country was building, or intended to build, nuclear weapons.<sup>12</sup> After the Israeli raid on the Iraqi nuclear project in June 1981, some Iraqi officials did declare that Iraq should obtain the bomb; this can only strengthen the argument that as long as Iraq had a chance to reach a nuclear option, it kept a low profile on the subject. But now that the Israeli raid has destroyed prospects of obtaining a nuclear option in the near future, Iraqi officials can express themselves more freely on this topic, and can reveal their hidden nuclear strategy.

A similar trend can be found in Libya. It is well known that Gaddafi is trying to reach a nuclear option. When answering a question concerning Libya's nuclear policy, however, he denied any such intentions. In February 1979, he said, 'We are working to obtain nuclear know-how in order to use it for peaceful purposes'.<sup>13</sup> In March 1980 he repeated this statement, and added that Libya did not want to have any nuclear weapons.<sup>14</sup> This policy results from the fact that while Libya has secretly been working to obtain the bomb since the early 1970s, it has also signed the NPT.

Clearly, then, as long as the nuclear efforts of a given country are still in progress, it will deny their existence. Therefore it is interesting to examine the position of one Arab state — Syria — which would like to acquire the bomb, but does not have the ability to do so in the near future. As a result, the Syrian nuclear strategy is more open than those of the other Arab revolutionary states. It seems that during the year 1978, Syria negotiated with India in order to obtain support for its nuclear plans. The Western press claimed that this Syrian initiative was the outcome of Assad's conclusion that it is pointless to negotiate with Israel as long as Israel has a nuclear monopoly in the Middle East.<sup>15</sup> While discussing Assad's visit to India's nuclear centre in Bombay, a senior Syrian official stated that the lack of a balance of terror in the Middle East had created an over-confident Israel. As long as this situation remained unchanged, he claimed, Israel would not be prepared to return Arab territory.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, the Iraqi and Libyan efforts to obtain the bomb can be integrated with the ambition to regain the occupied territories and even more, for this would be an impossible mission without first neutralizing the Israeli nuclear advantage. It is, however, clear that these nuclear objectives also stem from each nation's desire to augment its own power. Within the framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict, though, these individual goals do not change the overall situation and therefore will not be discussed in this article.

#### SUMMARY: FOUR ARAB STRATEGIES

When analyzing the nuclear policy of each state, we must distinguish between the declared strategy and the actual one. For our purposes, the declared nuclear strategy will be determined according to the general policy trend as indicated by the public announcements, speeches, statements, and interviews of a given nation's leadership. The actual strategy will be defined as the diplomatic, economic, military, and technological steps which have been taken by a state in order to bring it to nuclear status.

Based on these two criteria, we find four types of nuclear policy among the Arab states who are considered to be actual partners to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This typology can be summarized as follows:

|                                  | Non-nuclear<br>Actual Strategy                         | Pro-nuclear<br>Actual Strategy              |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Non-nuclear<br>Declared Strategy | Egypt (Sadat),<br>Saudi Arabia, Gulf<br>States, Jordan | Iraq (before the<br>Israeli raid),<br>Libya |
| Pro-nuclear<br>Declared Strategy | Syria,<br>Egypt (Fahmi)                                | Iraq (after the<br>Israeli raid)            |

### Israeli Perceptions

In Israel, there are three positions regarding nuclear armament: the official policy, which favours nuclear demilitarization of the Middle East; the pro-nuclear school of thought, which perceives nuclear weapons as a central element of Israel's security; and the conventional school of thought, which is opposed to having nuclear weapons, at least as long as the Arabs do not possess them.

#### (a) THE OFFICIAL POLICY

Israel's official position on the question of introducing nuclear weapons to the Middle East is clear: official documents from the Israeli Foreign Office as well as official declarations indicate this position. In a speech before the UN General Assembly on 27 November 1978, Israel's Ambassador Blum said that the Government of Israel had declared in the past that it would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> A year before, in October 1977, Moshe Dayan, then serving as Israeli foreign minister, had declared to the UN General Assembly that Israel was calling Arab neighbours 'to join in direct negotiations with a view to establishing a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East'.<sup>18</sup> Then he added, 'Israel firmly believes that such negotiations should lead to the conclusion of a formal, contractual, multilateral convention between all the states of the region, on the lines of such notable precedents as the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Latin America and the proposals for similar agreements in the areas of South Asia and the South Pacific. Unfortunately, the Arabs have totally rejected this call by Israel which, after all, is in the interests of all the people of the Middle East. On this occasion, I repeat our proposal'.<sup>19</sup>

While addressing the Israeli parliament on 30 July 1980, Dayan's successor, Yitzhak Shamir, made a similar statement. He said that Israel had, in the past, supported proposals designed to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and had voted in favour of the UN resolution to ratify the NPT in 1968, 'in the hope and belief that, in the course of time, practical ways would be found to prevent the spread of nuclear weaponry'.<sup>20</sup> Shamir went on to explain why Israel had never signed and ratified the NPT. 'In the years that

followed, Israel studied the various aspects of this Convention, paying particular heed to the attitude of the Arab states to the Convention. We learned that a large part of these states have not acceded to the Convention or else have not fulfilled their obligations under it'.<sup>21</sup> As an alternative to the NPT Convention, Shamir reiterated Israel's proposition that all states in the region hold direct negotiations in order to establish a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. This had been the official Israeli policy since 1974.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the official Israeli policy on the introduction of nuclear weapons to the Middle East is based on two elements: a) Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the region;<sup>23</sup> and b) the best way to accomplish this aim is to establish a nuclear-free zone that would include all Arab States and all potential Israeli enemies in the region; this agreement would also include nuclear guarantees from the superpowers as stipulated by the NPT.

In spite of the clear declarations of Israel's Foreign Office, the Israeli establishment is divided on the nuclear question. Furthermore, there is no correlation between the division of political forces among Israel's parties and the division of perceptions on the nuclear question. In the past there was some corresponding political division, when the Israeli political left, mainly 'Mapam' and 'Achdut Ha' Avodah' opposed an Israeli initiative in this particular area while 'Rafi' advocated it; but today one can find those who stand on both sides of the nuclear issue scattered throughout the political system. The division between 'hawks' and 'doves' simply does not apply to the nuclear problem: some very 'hawkish' members of the Israeli establishment are against Israeli nuclear weapons (e.g., Sharon), while some 'doves' favour an independent Israeli nuclear policy. This is because nuclear weapons are perceived by some Israeli strategists as an alternative to the Arab territories that have been occupied since 1967.<sup>24</sup>

It has long been the undeclared attitude of the Israeli government not to encourage a public debate on questions of nuclear strategy. Even so, an inspection of the oblique debate between 'pro' and 'anti' Israeli politicians and strategists in the security establishment reveals that there is no connection between Israel's official policy and the latent debates within its establishment.

#### (b) THE NUCLEAR SCHOOL OF THOUGHT — BEN-GURION, PERES, DAYAN

The decision to start building a nuclear option for Israel was approved by Ben-Gurion and his closest aides, despite the opposition of the other heads of his party, 'Mapai'. Some of the most senior members of Ben-Gurion's cabinet, both 'Mapai' members and other coalition ministers, were not even aware of the main details of the new project.<sup>25</sup> The decision was approved by Ben-Gurion, Peres, who was by then general manager of the Ministry of Defence, and Dayan, who was Chief of Staff. Significantly, the decision was taken following Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai after the Sinai-Suez Campaign of 1956 — a withdrawal brought about by the pressure of American threats to use economic and political sanctions, and Soviet threats to use military force. Also smarting from this political setback, Guy Mollet's cabinet decided after the Suez Campaign to assure France's future freedom of action from the

superpowers by building an independent nuclear force.<sup>26</sup> The fact that France already had a nuclear programme under way by 1957 and was willing to cooperate with Israel, enabled Ben-Gurion to implement the decision to begin an independent nuclear programme in Israel. It is doubtful, though, that Ben-Gurion would have taken such a drastic step if he had not been so pessimistic about Israel's future — both in the long and the short run.

The position of strength that Israel acquired in the eyes of the world as a result of the Sinai Campaign in October 1956 was not reflected in Ben-Gurion's perception of its status in the region. He expressed a very pessimistic point of view many times in his inner circle as well as during his talks with foreign leaders. Yitzchak Navon, the prime minister's secretary in the later 1950s, recalled some of Ben-Gurion's statements at that time. 'I could not sleep all night, not even for one second. I had one fear in my heart: a combined attack of all Arab armies'.<sup>27</sup> Another typical expression of his while in the company of his close aides was, 'What is Israel? ... A small spot ... How can she survive in this Arab World?'.<sup>28</sup> In his first meeting with De Gaulle in June 1960, Ben-Gurion said that there was no need for an Arab coalition to attack Israel. Egypt alone, with better planes, could do it.<sup>29</sup> Although he promised the French president that the reactor, then under construction had no military purposes, it seems that in the course of these talks as well as during talks with his aides, Ben-Gurion voiced his great fear that the 'quality' advantage of the Israel Defence Force would not be sufficient to withstand the Arab quantitative advantage. There were two possible solutions to this problem: 1) outside support, namely a pact with the Western powers; 2) the development of an independent deterrent power.<sup>30</sup> Today, we can assume that this 'deterrent power' could not have been conventional, since the conventional balance of power is exactly what was troubling Ben-Gurion. This deterrent capability would have to be characterized by the lack of need to mobilize the (non-existent, in Israel's case) masses, and would have to negate the Arab quantitative edge. It is therefore natural that in the long run, the Israeli deterrent force, in the eyes of Ben-Gurion and his close aides, had to be nuclear.

There are also some possible psychological explanations for Ben-Gurion's decision. For many years, the Israeli prime minister served his country and identified himself with it. He knew that his years in power were numbered: at 71 years of age in 1957, he wanted to leave his successor with the most defensible Israel he could. A nuclear option was the one, if not the only, measure that he considered best for this aim. In June 1963, shortly before retiring, Ben-Gurion paid a visit to Israel's Authority for the Development of Armaments. In a closed circle of trustworthy members, he secretly outlined his vision of Israel's future. 'We need all possible means of defence; and I don't want to say what the most effective means is and what it signifies'. ... We can ensure our security only if our enemies know that we possess effective weaponry with which to deter them'.<sup>31</sup> [my emphasis].

While Ben-Gurion's fear of the Arab masses seemed to be exaggerated, Shimon Peres offers some logical arguments to support his conviction that, in the long run, Israel will not survive if it relies on the conventional balance of

power. Peres is aware that Israel's pre-1967 borders are not defensible in conventional warfare. 'The length of Israel was given to us by her soldiers and farmers, the width of Israel was taken from us by the Arab reality'.<sup>32</sup> It is also clear to him that from the manpower and territory points of view, the Arabs enjoy a very significant advantage. Peres's objective, therefore, is to neutralize this quantitative advantage by adding new factors to the equation. 'The limits of quantitative superiority, and even its end, are more significant in the security field. The traditional strategy was based on three factors: quantitative superiority, geographical space, and duration of time. But these factors disappeared with the advent of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons and guided missiles'.<sup>33</sup> Peres seems to be saying that nuclear weapons will cancel out the disproportion existing between Israel and its neighbours; they will create a new scale in which the major — perhaps the only — measure of superiority is the number of nuclear warheads belonging to each side.

For Peres, a 'nuclear balance of power' is a source of hope, not of fear. 'The main danger of missiles (and whatever is said about missiles is true for similar types of weapons) is that only the aggressive side — the Arabs — will have them. On the other hand, if both sides own such weapons, their aggressiveness might be limited and the danger of war averted ... because the truth is that both sides will be vulnerable enough not to play with the idea of war'.<sup>34</sup>

The nuclear weapon, or 'science' in Peres's words, will thus bring about peace. 'Peace will not come by itself ... will not be brought about by foreign powers ... [and] will not sprout in the present political soil of the Middle East, but Israel can bring it closer — if she convinces the Arabs that with the help of science, we can eliminate their chance of defeating us, not only in the present, but also in the future'.<sup>35</sup>

Peres did not change his perception of the nuclear element as a means of neutralizing the Arab quantitative advantage even after the successful Six Day War in 1967.

Thus, what formerly constituted a 'nation's strength — space (and the nature of its topographic features), distance from the bases of potential enemies, and the capability of mass mobilization — has now been replaced by a new dimension of strength, compounded of scientific research, industrial capacity, organizational ability, and educational standards. Today, a country is measured not only in terms of size of territory and population but also in terms of scientific and technical levels and the talent to exploit the achievements of the new age and adapt them to its needs'.<sup>36</sup>

Peres also rejects the comparison between the State of Israel and the crusader's state; this comparison is usually favoured by those who believe that the Jewish state will not survive in the long run. 'The world is advancing increasingly to the point where the launching of war by anyone would be utter madness. The Middle East cannot lag far behind this development'.<sup>37</sup> This conception, according to which the struggle over the existence of Israel is a temporary phase that will end when the region becomes peaceful, also found expression in the chapter, 'Strategy for the Transition Period', in Peres's

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book, *Now-tomorrow*. This transition is described as being influenced by five principal factors, of which some are dependent on Israel's actions. He concludes that by the end of this period, the Middle East will be in a 'postwar' era, where '... the cost of war (and every major war in the future will take place under the shadow of nuclear weapons) will make the war itself an unacceptable phenomenon'.<sup>38</sup> In order to reach this stage, Israel must work in two directions: to reach political agreements that will not harm its security on the one hand, and to prove 'its undoubted ability to deter and subdue in the military arena'.<sup>39</sup> According to this, one can assume that the absolute deterrence Israel should achieve is nuclear; yet at this point, Peres moves one step farther. It is not enough that Israel should have the bomb; the Arabs must also be aware of this fact. In contrast to its present status and policy, Israel should declare a nuclear strategy based on either its options or on a real nuclear arsenal. Peres, who seems to be adhering to his perceptions, is still acting in accordance with this line. Thus, in reply to a Ma'ariv reporter's question about whether Israel was the first Middle Eastern country to begin nuclear research, he said, 'Luckily for us, yes. But Israel developed its *nuclear potential* under one declared restriction: We will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East... A danger of crossing the nuclear threshold does exist. We have to be prepared for it'.<sup>40</sup> [my emphasis].

For Peres, therefore, a nuclear option is a basic and essential part of Israel's security, for it would counterbalance the Arab edge in manpower and territory. In the long run, towards the year 2000, the Middle East will be ready to accept Israel; but until that time, Israel must have a nuclear 'ace in the hole' in order to guarantee success in its struggle for existence.

If Ben-Gurion was the one who decided that Israel should start building a nuclear option, and Peres was initially in charge of the project, Dayan was the one who made the decision in the late 1960s to move from a nuclear potential to production of the bomb, at least according to some sources.

In October 1957, when France agreed to assist in building the Israeli reactor in Dimona, Dayan was still serving as Chief of Staff. His special status with Ben-Gurion and the fact that the Prime Minister appreciated him more than any other Israeli military man, gave him a particularly influential position among the small group of decision makers. On 4 July 1962 during a memorial service for Eliahu Golomb, former head of the Jewish Haganah, Dayan and Peres spoke in favour of the nuclear school of thought; they claimed that the key to Israel's existence lay in 'capitalizing on the anticipated technological achievements of the 1970s... [and] arming the IDF with the equipment of the future'.<sup>41</sup> Considering that their adversaries — primarily Allon — demanded the strengthening of tactical air force and armour units,<sup>42</sup> one can infer that the question discussed was how to use Israel's limited resources: for the strengthening of conventional forces as Allon demanded or for the expected technology of the 1970s (i.e., nuclear weapons) as Peres and Dayan demanded.

Domestic political problems and crises in the mid-1960s led Dayan, Ben-Gurion, and Peres to leave the leading party, Mapai, and to form the small

party of Rafi. This 'pro-nuclear party', as it was later called, had little influence on decision-making in Israel until May 1967, when Dayan was nominated minister of defence on the eve of the Six Day War. Although the 1967 war seemed to demonstrate that Israel could attain superiority over its enemies with conventional forces, Dayan believed that the continuing war of attrition, mainly on the banks of the Suez Canal, showed the inadvisability of Israel's reliance on conventional forces alone in the long run.

Some researchers suggest that Israel moved from a nuclear option to a 'bomb in the basement' while Dayan served as minister of defence and as the highest authority on defence problems in Golda Meir's cabinet.<sup>43</sup> Dayan took this step more because of the regional balance of power between the superpowers, than because of the balance between Israel and her neighbours. The first element in Dayan's considerations was the French embargo of 1967. Imposed after 12 years of Israeli reliance on French military equipment, the embargo proved just how dependent Israel was on the nations supplying it with arms. Although preparations had been made for a rainy day, and the IDF had started arming itself with American weapons even before the embargo, for Dayan the French 'lesson' was that the supply of American equipment could not be assured forever because it was conditional upon certain political circumstances. His conclusion was that Israel should achieve maximum independence in the supply of equipment to its army.<sup>44</sup>

If this were the only calculation Dayan had in mind, it can be assumed that the strengthening of Israel's defence industry would have been enough for him. In fact, planning for the production of an Israeli tank and fighter bomber did begin during this period. Nevertheless, it seems that a more important element in Dayan's calculation was the growing Soviet involvement in the conflict. In a visit to Israel after the 1967 war, Henry Kissinger described the United States' Middle Eastern policy: 1) the aim of each American president was to avoid a world war; 2) the United States would not go to war against the USSR over the territories occupied by Israel after 1967; 3) the Soviets were aware of this fact.<sup>45</sup> From Dayan's point of view, this situation meant that Israel could withstand combined Arab-Soviet pressure during the war of attrition primarily because of American assistance — but the United States would not intervene directly in the conflict while the USSR might be willing to do so. He saw the Soviet Union as a rising power — and the United States as a nation with waning influence. For the Soviets, the Middle East was a vital interest, and since they wanted to change the status quo in their favour, they might take the risks that the Americans would never take. Proof of these perceptions was offered by the growing involvement of the Russians in the war of attrition and its climax — a dogfight between Russian and Israeli pilots (with 5 Soviet-made MiG-21s shot down and no casualties for Israel). Furthermore, the Soviets took responsibility for the anti-aircraft defence of Egypt except for the Suez Canal zone itself. On the other hand, American support for Israel was not guaranteed, and even when given it would be restricted by certain political limitations. In 1968, the United States tried to link the supply of 50 Phantom jets to the condition that Israel agree to sign the NPT.<sup>46</sup> Dayan did not consider an Israeli signature on the NPT in exchange



for a similar Arab move as a *quid pro quo*, because Israel already had superiority in this field over the Arabs. His objective was maximum security for Israel combined with maximum flexibility in Israeli foreign policy in order to achieve defensible borders. The degree of Israeli manoeuvrability between the superpowers was directly related to whether or not it had a nuclear arsenal. Thus, an independent nuclear programme would expand Israel's freedom of action, especially with regard to the USSR, and would add some uncertainty to Soviet calculations concerning direct intervention in the conflict. It might even thwart such a Soviet move, which would never be prevented by the Americans themselves. Furthermore, the Arabs would probably demand that the Soviets supply them with nuclear weapons; and if the USSR did so, it would violate the NPT, thereby losing prestige and credibility all over the world, and risking direct confrontation with the United States. Dayan felt that these risks were enough to keep the USSR from supplying nuclear weapons to the Arab states.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, Dayan probably had one more calculation in mind: a Soviet refusal to supply Arab states — particularly Egypt — with nuclear arms might cause a split between both sides, thus reducing Soviet activity in the region. It is difficult to know whether the Israeli latent nuclear threat is directed against Soviet territory, but one should bear in mind that part of this territory is within range of Israeli bomber-fighters. This might be another consideration that pushed Dayan toward a nuclear strategy.

The end of the war of attrition without Israeli territorial concessions was a success from Dayan's point of view. Between 1970 and 1973 he dropped hints from time to time about Israeli nuclear ability. It is difficult to determine whether or not Dayan considered such veiled references to be the best policy, but it is most likely that disagreement within Golda Meir's cabinet led to a policy of compromise, which prevented an open nuclear doctrine on the one hand, yet warned the Arabs and the rest of the world that there was a nuclear arsenal in Israel's basement. Dayan, however, believed that in the next ten years, i.e., until the early 1980s, the Arabs would not initiate a war. The Israeli nuclear advantage was probably a key factor in this conception, which considered ten years as the minimum time needed by the Arabs to produce their own bomb.<sup>48</sup>

The October war put some of Dayan's assumptions to the test. The start of the war certainly disproved his belief that the Arabs would not initiate a full-scale war before making sure that they could neutralize the latent Israeli nuclear threat. Although Egypt and Syria had limited war aims, no one in Israel saw it that way when the war was still in progress.

There is some evidence that in the most critical state of the fight, when it seemed that Syrian forces were about to invade behind the 'green line', Dayan put the Israeli nuclear force on alert.<sup>49</sup> If this actually happened, it might explain the appearance of a Soviet military supply vessel carrying nuclear warheads in Port Said on 25 October 1973;<sup>50</sup> and if the Soviets did bring these arms in reaction to an Israeli nuclear alert, they disproved the conceptions of Dayan's pro-nuclear group. This demonstrated that even under the threat of an Israeli 'bomb in the basement', the Arab side could ignore the threat, embark upon a

war, and even receive nuclear guarantees from the Soviet Union.

Dayan continued to express his views of the best nuclear policy for Israel even after he resigned from the position of minister of defence. In a lecture to the Israeli-American Chamber of Commerce in March 1976, he proposed that Israel move to an open nuclear strategy, i.e., that it move from the 'bomb in the basement' stage to declared nuclear ability. Avraham Schweitzer, a reporter from the daily *Ha'aretz* who was very close to Dayan, explained this doctrine as follows. Israel should become publicly nuclear for three principal reasons: 1) it would facilitate a solution to the conflict, including Israeli territorial concessions to Egypt and Syria, without jeopardizing Israel's security; 2) a declared nuclear option would give practical authorization to a settlement if it should be reached; 3) it would decrease the defence expenditures needed for a new conventional arms race.<sup>51</sup>

One of Dayan's major, if not most important, conclusions from the Yom Kippur War was that Israel had

... more or less reached its quantitative limits. In the long run, it will be difficult for Israel to increase the size of its army; to add a large number of airplanes and tanks (this means not only a very high financial outlay with the growing sophistication and development of arms, but also prolonged periods of military service for many young people); to simultaneously continue a normal way of life, civilian economic activity, education, absorption of immigrants, settling the country, and industrialization. Therefore Israel must guarantee the balance of power against the rapidly expanding Arab military forces by increasing the quality of its arms — a quality that will ensure that every Arab attempt to conquer and destroy Israel will end with the destruction of its enemies.<sup>52</sup>

A year before he died, Dayan reiterated these ideas, word for word, in an interview with the daily *Ha'aretz*, and then added, 'I don't want to enter into any details here. The concept of *quality* is enough for me; and it is really a diversified concept ranging from nuclear weapons to electronic weapons and conventional arms'<sup>53</sup> [my emphasis].

Thus, Dayan suggested basing Israel's deterrent force on a new conception as expressed in this formula: the decrease of the intensity of the conflict (through territorial concessions) + valid deterrence from decisive war (nuclear weapons) + conventional forces sufficient to provide self-defence in a limited, conventional war = reasonable security at a reasonable cost. It is interesting to note that more than ten years earlier Peres had proposed a similar formula, which could not, of course, have included any territorial concessions because the 1967 war had not yet taken place. According to Peres, 'Israel should give special military attention to three existing problems: strategic deterrence and the ability to destroy the enemy with new weapons, if deterrence should fail; tactical ability and making the most of strategic possibilities with the force of a conventional army; and maintaining peace along the border through border settlements, proper organization of *territorial* defence, and proper military and police units'<sup>54</sup> [my emphasis].

**The Conventional School of Thought: Rabin, Tal, Allon, Ber, Pa'il, Sharon**

At the root of the debate between the pro-nuclear and conventional schools of thought in Israel is the question of whether Israel, in the current as well as predicted quantitative proportions of the conflict, will be able to preserve its security solely through the conventional forces of the IDF. Those who believe that the army is, and will always be, a deterrent reject the introduction of nuclear arms to the conflict. It can be presumed that if Ben-Gurion, Dayan, Peres, and other advocates of nuclear weapons had believed that a conventional military force was enough either to deter any attack against Israel or to defeat any possible Arab military coalition, they would have avoided introducing the ultimate deterrence into the conflict. It can also be presumed that even the proponents of nuclear deterrence (perhaps even more than others) understand the dangers inherent in the absolute weapons; and if at all possible, they would rely only on the conventional forces of the IDF.

The arguments against Israel's nuclear initiative are of two main types: (a) it is possible to create political and military terms which will give the IDF conventional superiority over the Arabs and ensure its ability to protect Israel; (b) introduction of nuclear weapons to the region will harm Israel's defensibility vis-à-vis the Arab world.

Among those who envision a realistic possibility of maintaining the conventional balance of power in the future are some IDF senior commanders. The most well-known are Rabin, Allon, Sharon, Tal, and Pa'il. Yitzhak Rabin was Chief of Staff during the 1967 war, and served as prime minister from 1974 to 1977. He has rarely referred to the nuclear problem, ignoring it insofar as he could. In an October 1979 article on Israel's security problems in the 1980s,<sup>55</sup> he describes some of the most important factors influencing Israel's security. These include the Arab world, which will continue to be unstable in the future; the policies of the superpowers, whose interests will remain the same although their methods might change; changes in Israel's decision-making approaches (due to the workings of its democratic system); and the quality as well as quantity of the arms race in the region. Rabin rejects the assumption that nuclear weapons will be introduced into the Middle Eastern theatre during the 1980s. This is exactly the opposite of what has been claimed by his adversary — Peres — who estimates that by the late 1980s, the theatre will already be nuclear. The primary objective of Israel's defence policy, according to Rabin, is to make sure that the present Israeli-Arab balance of power does not tilt in favour of the Arabs; therefore, Israel must take steps to ensure itself a supply of arms mainly from external sources but also from domestic ones. In contrast to Dayan and Peres, who saw the future of conventional deterrence as an outcome of Israel's ability to counterbalance the Arab masses with masses of its own, Rabin claims that 'the factor that limited, still limits, and will limit the power of the IDF is the means of warfare, not the amount of manpower'.<sup>56</sup> Rabin believes that the major limitation faced by Israel is the budget: the key is Israel's ability to obtain enough money to enable it to use all its manpower potential. The solution, therefore, is not a nuclear doctrine, but a special relationship with

the United States, which will assure Israel the military and economic aid necessary to expand the IDF.

Rabin believes that the great powers will not allow all enemy forces to be totally defeated. Therefore Israel will never be able to force Arab countries into political concessions. However, under certain political conditions, the army will be able to make some significant, though limited, achievements. Support for such an assertion is provided by the 1948 war, which established the borders for 19 years, and the 1967 war, which enabled Israel to use its territorial gains as a basis for subsequent negotiations. Rabin, who believes it is impossible to differentiate between the military and political sectors, delineates three major long-term aims for Israeli decision makers: (a) a military buildup sufficient to protect the country against any possible Arab coalition; (b) enough military might to convince the Arabs that the conflict must be moved to the political, instead of military, arena; (c) enough military force to safeguard the peace treaty with Egypt as well as future peace treaties with other Arab nations.

Major General (Res.) Tal also seems to reject the nuclear option as part of Israel's deterrence policy.<sup>57</sup> Tal claims that Israeli deterrence has never failed in the past, and will not fail in the future, if Israel uses the correct policy. He defines deterrence as the potential ability to defeat an enemy. As long as an enemy believes he cannot defeat Israel, he will not embark upon a war; and if he does so, either because he believes in his ability to overcome the Israeli forces, or because he has political (as in the October war) — not military — objectives, the IDF must defeat him. This defeat means sanctions in terms of lost territory, military power, and prestige.

Since 1967, according to Tal, the Arab world started making distinctions between acceptable moves that even Israel's friends would consider legitimate, and unacceptable moves that they would assist Israel in combatting. We can assume that Tal is referring to the difference between an Arab offensive involving the territories occupied in 1967, and an Arab invasion of Israel's pre-1967 borders. The latter type of invasion would mean an attempt to annihilate the state and, without a doubt, the United States as well as some other nations would respond with force to such an Arab action.

Like Rabin, Tal considers Israeli dependence on a friendly superpower — the United States — as a central part of the strategy of deterrence: in contrast to Rabin, who relies almost exclusively on the United States, Tal claims that Israel should make full use of its potential as well as of American economic and military aid, in order to achieve maximum political and military independence. In any case, he does not mention nuclear arms as a component of Israeli strategy; and since he considers such conventional strategy adequate to ensure the country's safety, we can conclude that he rejects the introduction of a nuclear option into the Middle East.

Those who oppose an independent nuclear doctrine for Israel have a wide range of arguments to prove the danger of creating a balance of terror in the Middle East. In his book, *A Curtain of Sand*, Yigal Allon asserts that since 1948, the balance of power in the Middle East has steadily improved in favour of Israel; the Sinai Campaign in 1956 and particularly the 1967 war proved



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Israel's ability to defeat Arab coalitions in conventional warfare. 'Time works for those who work for it', and, therefore, if Israel employs the right policy in the future, there is no reason why the situation should change. Allon does not believe that Israel should rely on only one source of arms supply because he fears an embargo and overdependence on foreign military guarantees.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, he rejects the nuclear option on the basis of the following arguments: (a) conventional weapons are a much more flexible means of deterrence than nuclear ones. (b) being more rigid, nuclear deterrence creates a situation of 'either/or'; since nuclear arms are considered to be weapons of last resort, Arab countries can conceivably initiate a limited war in which Israel would not be able to make use of its nuclear superiority. Thus, the credibility of nuclear deterrence would become weakened, thereby increasing the enemy's freedom of choice. (c) Israel will have to pay a very high political cost in order to become nuclear. The superpowers might even use a 'gunboat' policy to destroy the Israeli project. (d) Israel's introduction of nuclear weapons to the region might spur the Arabs on to a similar policy. In such a situation, Israel might lose its relative advantage and freedom of action against 'salami tactic' operations along its borders.<sup>60</sup>

To this, Allon adds two more arguments: one cannot compare the balance of terror between the superpowers to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The superpowers have very stable and responsible governments, while the régimes in the Middle East are sometimes very extreme and unreliable. Because of the irresponsibility of some Arab leaders, an Arab nuclear potential would be a constant threat to Israel even if a second strike that would destroy the attacking state were assured. In addition a nuclear balance of power would eliminate the Israeli advantages in conventional forces. In a conventional balance of power, the quality of the régime, the structure of society, and the quality of the individual soldier are all very important. These advantages would lose their importance in a situation of nuclear balance of terror, thus giving the Arabs an edge because they are *a priori* known to be irresponsible.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, Allon is not opposed to an Israeli nuclear research project, chiefly because he believes that Israel should not be second in a nuclear race if the Arabs start one.<sup>62</sup>

It is important to note that Allon wrote this book shortly after the Six-Day War, when he was still under the influence of Israel's overwhelming victory. This is probably the reason for his quite optimistic assessment that in the long run, Israel would be able to maintain and even increase its advantage in the conventional balance of power. One should remember, however, that Allon is a long-time adversary of the pro-nuclear group, as was already mentioned in the discussion of the debate between him and Peres and Dayan in July 1962.<sup>63</sup>

While serving in Eshkol's cabinet, before Dayan joined it in June 1967, Allon was the highest authority for defence problems. It seems that under his influence, Eshkol turned to a policy of 'nuclear exchange', of which the main result was American military and economic aid. Its climax was the American agreement in 1966 to sell Israel weapons that were defined as 'offensive', e.g., M-48 Patton tanks and A-4 Skyhawk fighter-bombers.<sup>64</sup> Following the 1967

war, Dayan, as defence minister, seemed to become dominant in the government, and Allon had to acquiesce in the decision to have a 'bomb in the basement'. The arrival of Soviet nuclear warheads in the port of Alexandria during the October war (possibly in order to neutralize the latent Israeli nuclear threat against Egypt and Syria) proved to Allon that a 'bomb in the basement' was not an effective deterrent if the enemy chose to ignore it and succeeded in securing nuclear guarantees from the USSR.<sup>65</sup>

Other arguments against the 'nuclearization' of Israel have been set forth by Yisrael Ber. This Israeli strategist, who was once convicted of spying for the USSR, is considered to represent (along with Pa'il) the viewpoint of the left.

His basic assumptions, which are valid today even though they were written almost 20 years ago, were that Israeli resources are limited, and that the superpowers are opposed to nuclear proliferation in the Middle East as well as in any other part of the world. According to these assumptions, a recommendation for a nuclear option would mean that: (a) Israel, whose long-term ability to sustain an expensive conventional arms race is doubtful, would enter into a new, more intense, and more expensive type of arms race; (b) it would also mean limiting the conventional forces of the IDF to a point where they might lose their efficiency; (c) it would encourage a mutiny against the superpowers and cause international nuclear anarchy.<sup>66</sup>

Ber dismissed the belief that Israel would be able to preserve a nuclear monopoly in the long run. Rife with disadvantages, a 'balance of terror' situation would hold nothing positive for Israel. A comparison between the superpowers and the countries of the Middle East is not valid, because the superpowers are roughly parallel in the main elements that constitute their nuclear forces — size of territory, defence measures, number and quality of launching systems, etc. This situation does not exist in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, Ber believed that Israel and its neighbours could reach a political settlement without resorting to the nuclear factor. He particularly contrasted the vulnerability of a pre-1967 Israel to an Arab nuclear threat, with the survivability of the Arab world, which stretches from Morocco in the west to Iraq in the east. The temptation to launch a surprise attack against Israel would be much stronger than the temptation to strike Arab targets and nuclear centres. Furthermore, an Israeli attack on Arab targets would still allow the Arabs a second strike.<sup>67</sup>

Ber also rejected the argument that Israel would be able to exchange its nuclear option for international guarantees for her borders. As proof, he cited a famous debate between Kissinger, who opposed such proliferation, and Pierre Gallois, the French general who favoured it. As an example of his viewpoint Gallois described an exchange of nuclear bombs between Egypt and Israel, of which the world would hear only after they had been totally destroyed. Thus, he concluded, the superpowers would have no argument for intervening.<sup>68</sup>

Ber summarized his argument by asserting that an Israeli nuclear option would not solve the basic strategic problems of the country because of the following three reasons: (a) the superpowers would oppose such a project and would probably prevent the creation of such an option. Therefore its value as

a bargaining tool was illusory. (b) Even if not prevented by the superpowers, a nuclear arms race would erode Israel's economic strength and harm its conventional power. (c) A nuclear arms race in the region, if not stopped by external forces, might culminate in the destruction of Israel and in a horrible disaster for the Jewish people.<sup>69</sup>

The nuclear debate in Israel, as was mentioned earlier, is not a debate along the lines of 'hawks' and 'doves'. 'Superhawks' and 'superdoves' can be found on the same side of this issue. The best example of this is that both Major-General (Res.) Ariel Sharon — now Israeli minister of defence — and Colonel (Res.) Meir Pa'il — who belongs to the more extreme left — oppose the introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East by Israel. The problem is not ideological; it is very practical, for both of these ex-military men reject a nuclear doctrine on the basis of tactical and practical military arguments.

Sharon claims<sup>70</sup> that a nuclear balance of terror would not eradicate the danger of conventional war, terrorist activities, and wars of attrition. During the Korean and Vietnam wars, the United States had nuclear devices which it did not use. In war, he argues, nuclear weaponry would actually *prevent* the achievement of decisive results, since both sides in the conflict would almost always stop short of the point of no return. This is a very weak point for Israel, whose army is not designed for long wars but for decisive, short ones. In a 'balance of terror' situation, the IDF would be deprived of this crucial advantage. Sharon believes that another central issue concerns the nature of decision making in a nuclear balance of terror environment. In a conventional war, when both sides hold nuclear weapons, the decision-making process will be very slow and laborious, yet it will also be difficult to ensure that the message which one side sends to the other will be understood as intended. Lack of understanding might result in much graver consequences than could be caused by conventional warfare. As a final argument, Sharon questions the discretion of some Arab leaders. This is the most famous and commonly used argument of all those who reject the 'nuclearization' of the conflict.

Meir Pa'il also claims<sup>71</sup> that a balance of terror in the Middle East would only limit Israel and perhaps even do serious harm to its security. He believes that the objective advantage in such a situation belongs to the side that can disperse its population, its main economic resources, and its military and launching systems. In the Middle East, this advantage lies with the Arabs. Theoretically, however, Israel can counterbalance the Arab advantage by building more launching systems and dispersing them not only throughout its limited territory, but also in the air, sea, and even outer space; yet this possibility is currently so technically and economically difficult that it 'cannot be achieved in a realistic period of time'.<sup>72</sup> Balance of terror, according to Pa'il, might cause Israel to lose its political freedom of action. He assumes that the Arab world would never act as one state or as a federation — at least not until the end of this century. Therefore it is possible that within the framework of the Arab consensus to destroy Israel, there would be some Arab states that would not hesitate to cause a crisis, even at the risk of touching off a nuclear exchange between Israel and Egypt or Syria. Like Ber, Pa'il claims that only part of the Arab world would be in danger of destruction in the event of a

nuclear war, while for Israel this would mean total annihilation. Under such conditions, even if both sides threatened to start a nuclear war, the Arab threat would be considered more likely to be carried out; thus, Israel would be vulnerable to political pressure from enemies and friends alike.

In the military field alone, the introduction of nuclear arms would be a disadvantage. At the end of the 1948 war, the IDF started to develop a strategy based on armoured offensive attack combined with sea and air power assistance; it went on to make better use of this strategy in the 1956, 1967, and 1973 wars, when such operations did defeat the enemy. Offensive operations accompanied by moves toward the enemy capital and occupation of large amounts of enemy territory might be interpreted (as in the past) as endangering the enemy's régime. In response to such a situation, the other side could easily threaten to stop the Israeli offensive with nuclear weapons, thereby nullifying the IDF's formerly so effective strategy. Alternatively, conventional warfare might be completely replaced by guerrilla and terrorist activities, which would render nuclear weapons virtually impotent. Even large retaliation raids (like the Litani operation in 1978) could become extinct because of the danger that the enemy might threaten a nuclear response. In short, Pa'il argues that a nuclear balance of terror would increase Israel's vulnerability to nuclear blackmail and undermine the IDF's previously successful strategy.

#### Summary: Available Options and Possible Activities in the Future

This brief look at attitudes toward nuclear weapons in the Middle East has yielded one very clear conclusion: there is a certain parallelism between the Israeli and Arab schools of thought. Just as there are those in Israel who oppose introducing the nuclear element as a central component of their nation's defense doctrine, there are also those in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, who wish to avoid the nuclearization of the conflict.

Dr Ibrahim Hamuda, the director of the Egyptian nuclear energy agency, gave the following response to a question concerning Israel's potential in this area: 'As long as a certain state does not make a nuclear test, it cannot be said with certainty that it possesses such a weapon. It is possible to evaluate and assume, but we cannot give a definite answer without proof'.<sup>73</sup> One should remember that the Arab nuclear effort is explained as a reaction to the presumed Israeli one. When a senior official who deals in this sensitive subject claims that from the Egyptian point of view, Israel cannot be proven to have a nuclear arsenal as long as it does not conduct public tests, he means that Egypt currently has no intention of entering into a nuclear arms race.

Israel's main problem, however, is that the Arab world does not think or act as one. The assumption that Egypt is not trying to become nuclear by no means applies to Iraq or Libya. It is therefore useful to examine the possible options proposed by both Israeli schools of thought in response to the growing Arab nuclear threat:

(a) Israel could declare that it is a non-nuclear state which has no intention of becoming nuclear in the future. Israel would then join the NPT and open its

nuclear centres to international inspection. Clearly, this move would be subject to the conditions that the rest of the Middle Eastern states join the NPT, and that the superpowers give nuclear guarantees as specified in the treaty.

(b) Although Israel has officially called for the nuclear demilitarization of the Middle East since 1974, the Arab world seems to perceive of this as merely a ruse to conceal Israel's actual nuclear ability. There is a possibility of trying to neutralize the region with the aid of the world's five nuclear nations, who are interested (as might be expected) in keeping the Middle East free of nuclear devices.

(c) Israel could attempt to prevent Arab states from obtaining nuclear weapons through diplomatic means, covert operations, or declarations that such Arab attempts would be regarded as a *casus belli*. Since Arab states (such as Iraq and Libya) need foreign aid to achieve nuclear status, Israel, with American assistance, could pressure those (mainly Western) countries who help the Arab efforts, to stop doing so.

Covert operations, such as the mysterious incidents involving the Iraqi nuclear efforts, could hinder Arab progress. It is hardly plausible that Israel could prevent the realization of an Arab nuclear weapon in this manner, but it might be able to extend the time needed to acquire one.

Finally, if all other efforts failed, Israel could declare that an Arab intention to build a nuclear arsenal would be regarded as a *casus belli*. It would be difficult for Israel to destroy an Arab nuclear project in a distant country with a ground offensive, but this objective might be achieved with an air attack. Considering the success of its raid on Iraq's Tammuz project, Israel has, and probably will continue to have, the means to carry out such missions. In the foreseeable future, there will also be an international consensus on the need to prevent proliferation; and it is likely that the neighbouring Arab states would feel threatened by any individual Arab nuclear effort (such as those in Iraq and Libya). Therefore, any Israeli military move to prevent the Arab acquisition of nuclear ability would probably be condemned publicly but blessed secretly by the rest of the world.

(d) If Israel does not have the bomb, it can try to obtain a nuclear ability to counterbalance any future Arab nuclear arsenal.

(e) If Israel already has the bomb, it can make a public statement to that effect, and declare its nuclear doctrine. This would lead to a nuclear balance of terror if and when the Arabs should obtain nuclear weapons.

Among these five policy options, the conventional school of thought would clearly favour the first two alternatives, while the pro-nuclear one would favour the last two. The third alternative, which advocates attempting to achieve an Israeli nuclear monopoly, is the only option on which the two schools of thought could conceivably compromise. For the 'conventionalists', this would mean avoiding a balance of terror with all of its negative ramifications for Israel. For the pro-nuclear group, this would mean that Israel could continue to hold the nuclear card as a last resort.

Of course, the Arab potential for achieving a nuclear force is not conditional only upon Israel and its intentions. If it were possible to ensure that the arms race in the region would be confined to its present conventional

level, with an Israeli nuclear monopoly, the demands of both schools of thought would be satisfied. However, even though Israel might be able to cause a short-term delay in the nuclearization of some Arab states, it is hardly believable that it could block such developments in the long run.

Some claim that a preferable strategy for Israel is to let Arab states achieve nuclear potential, and then declare its own nuclear status, thus creating a balance of terror in the region. This would at least partially end the very expensive conventional arms race. It seems, though, that a nuclear monopoly would anyhow enable Israel to limit its conventional forces in a way that would not harm its ability to fight a conventional war on at least one front while neutralizing the other front with a latent or declared nuclear threat. One should bear in mind that in the future, the Sinai will almost entirely be a demilitarized zone, thus enabling Israel to use its nuclear power in a relatively large area with no civilian population.

It seems, therefore, that, in the foreseeable future, Israel will attempt to prevent the Arab acquisition of nuclear weapons while augmenting its own nuclear capacity and number of launching systems. Assuming that Israel already has nuclear potential, it seems evident that the future (and probably already the present) hidden domestic debate will focus on the advantages of a declared and open nuclear strategy as advocated by the pro-nuclear school of thought, and the rejection of such a move as irreversible and dangerous by those favouring an exclusively conventional balance of power. According to most indications, this question will be decided upon before the end of the 1980s.

## NOTES

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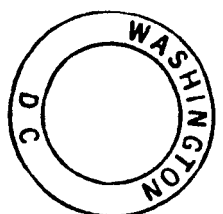
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